



Knowing Malawi, knowing ourselves: Understanding the outcomes of service learning research in a developing country setting over time

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Summary

Since 2004, university faculty, student researchers, Malawian colleagues, U.S.-based secondary students and their teacher/leaders, and others have engaged year-round to carry out an annual month of face-to-face in-country service learning research in Malawi. This symposium highlights the perspectives of these diverse stakeholders to examine outcomes of our collective knowing over time. In addition, we reflect together on outcomes that extend beyond this project in and of itself, into the trajectories of participants over time asking how they are changed by this experience. Finally, we examine our ways of collaborative knowledge-making within long-term community-based participatory action research (PAR).

We draw on nine years of collaboration with learners, teachers, and leaders in the rural southern region of Malawi. People there struggle to survive among social and political turmoil resulting from a devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic, recurring famines and failure of the country to attain “food sovereignty,” recent implementation of a universal public education initiative, and an ongoing struggle for democratic government. While our work addresses education, health, and hunger, more and more we recognize together the need to document how leadership is understood in Malawi. Few scholars have undertaken long-term research into how indigenous people understand what it now means to lead in a developing country setting. This lack of scholarship on how people in developing post-colonial countries imagine and enact leadership forms a significant gap in the literature (Lokkesmoe, 2011).

We purposefully juxtapose our varying stakeholder perspectives to recreate a sense of our work as we have experienced it over time. Some threads that will invite audience involvement include:

- how participants change over time, as a result of our engagements with each other;
- how students are learning together within a service learning project that involves American students as English language pen pals with learners in Malawian schools;
- provision of solar radios for Malawian teachers to use in teaching literacy in the Mother Tongue;
- examining the impact of media on "captive mind" issues with youth in Malawi; and
- perspectives on change from the focal two Malawian educators whose participation has been continuous since 2004.

References

There were no references provided with this proposal.